

**Thomas Jefferson to John Minor, August 30, 1814,
with Copy of Reading List to Bernard Moore; Partial
Transcription Available , from The Works of Thomas
Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected
and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.**

TO JOHN MINOR J. MSS.

Monticello Aug. 30. 14

Dear Sir, —I have at length found the paper of which you requested a copy. It was written near 50. years ago for the use of a young friend whose course of reading was confided to me; and it formed a basis for the studies of others subsequently placed under my direction, but curtailed for each in proportion to his previous acquirements and future views. I shall give it to you without change, except as to the books recommended to be read; later publications enabling me in some of the departments of science to substitute better, for the less perfect publications which we then possessed. In this the modern student has great advantage. I proceed to the copy.¹

1 TH. JEFFERSON TO BERNARD MOORE.

“Before you enter on the study of the law a sufficient groundwork must be laid. For this purpose an acquaintance with the Latin and French languages is absolutely necessary. The former you have; the latter must now be acquired. Mathematics and Natural philosophy are so useful in the most familiar occurrences of life, and are so peculiarly engaging & delightful as would induce every person to wish an acquaintance with them. Besides this, the faculties of the mind, like the members of the body, are strengthened

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& improved by exercise. Mathematical reasonings & deductions are therefore a fine preparation for investigating the abstruse speculations of the law. In these and the analogous branches of science the following elementary books are recommended.

Mathematics. Berout, Cours de Mathematiques. The best for a student ever published. Montucla or Bossu's histoire des mathematiques.

Astronomy. Ferguson and Le Monnier, or de la Lande.

Geography. Pinkerton.

Nat. Philosophy. Joyce's Scientific dialogues. Martin's Philosophica Britannica. Mussenbroek's Cours de Physique.

This foundation being laid, you may enter regularly on the study of the Laws, taking with it such of it's kindred sciences as will contribute to eminence in it's attainment. The principal of these are Physics, Ethics, Religion, Natural law, Belles lettres, Criticism,

Rhetoric and Oratory. The carrying on several studies at a time is attended with advantage. Variety relieves the mind, as well as the eye, palled with too long attention to a single object. But with both, transitions from one object to another may be so frequent and transitory as to leave no impression. The mean is therefore to be steered, and a competent space of time allotted to each branch of study. Again, a great inequality is observable in the vigor of the mind at different periods of the day. It's powers at these periods should therefore be attended to in marshalling the business of the day. For these reasons I should recommend the following distribution of your time.

Till VIII o'clock in the morning employ yourself in Physical studies, Ethics, Religion, natural and sectarian, and Natural law, reading the following books.

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Agriculture. Dickson's husbandry of the antiénts. Tull's horseshoeing husbandry. Ld Kaim's Gentleman farmer. Young's Rural Economy. V. Hale's body of husbandry. De-Serre's Theatre d'Agriculture.

Chemistry. Lavoisier. Conversations in Chemistry.

Anatomy. John and James Bell's Anatomy.

Zoology. Abregé du Systeme de Linnée par Gilbert.

Manuel d'histoire Naturel par Blumenbach.

Buffon, including Montbeillard & La Cepede.

Wilson's American Ornithology.

Botany. Barton's elements of Botany. Turton's Linnæus.

Person Synopsis Plantarum.

Ethics. & Natl Religion. Locke's Essay. Locke's conduct of the mind in the search after truth. Stewart's Philosophy of the human mind. Enfield's history of Philosophy. Condorcet, Progrès de l'esprit Humain.

Cicero de officiis. Tusculana. de Senectute. Somnium Scipionis. Senecae Philosophica. Hutchinson's Introduction to Moral Philosophy. Ld Kaim's Natural Religion. Traite elementaire de Morale et Bonheur. La Sagesse de Charron.

Religion. Sectarian Bible. New Testament. Commentaries on them by Middleton in his works, and by Priestley in his Corruptions of Christianity, & Early opinions of Christ. Volney's Ruins. The sermons of Sterne, Masillon & Bourdaloue.

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Natural Law. Vattel Droit des Gens. Reyneval. Institutions du droit de la Nature et des Gens.

From VIII. to XII. read law. The general course of this reading may be formed on the following grounds. Ld Coke has given us the first view of the whole body of law worthy now of being studied: for so much of the admirable work of Bracton is now obsolete that the student should turn to it occasionally only, when tracing the history of particular portions of the law. Coke's Institutes are a perfect Digest of the law as it stood in his day. After this, new laws were added by the legislature, and new developments of the old laws by the Judges, until they had become so voluminous as to require a new Digest. This was ably executed by Matthew Bacon, altho' unfortunately under an Alphabetical instead of Analytical arrangement of matter. The same process of new laws & new decisions on the old laws going on, called at length for the same operation again, and produced the inimitable Commentaries of Blackstone.

In the department of the Chancery, a similar progress has taken place. Ld. Kaim has given us the first digest of the principles of that branch of our jurisprudence, more valuable for the arrangement of matter; than for it's exact conformity with the English decisions. The Reporters from the early time of that branch to that of the same Matthew Bacon are well digested, but alphabetically also, in the Abridgement of the Cases in Equity, the 2d volume of which is said to have been done by him. This was followed by a number of able reporters of which Fonblanque has given us a summary digest by commentaries on the text of the earlier work, ascribed to Ballow, entitled 'a Treatise of Equity.' The course of reading recommended then in these two branches of Law is the following.

Common Law. Coke's institutes.

Select cases from the subsequent reporters to the time of

Matthew Bacon.

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Bacon's Abridgement.

Select cases from the subsequent reporters to the present time.

Select tracts on Law, among which those of Baron Gilbert are all of the first merit.

The Virginia laws. Reports on them.

Chancery. Ld Kaim's principles of Equity. 3d edition.

Select cases from the Chancery reporters to the time of Matthew Bacon.

The Abridgement of Cases in Equity.

Select cases from the subsequent reporters to the present day.

Fonblanque's Treatise of equity.

Blackstone's Commentaries (Tucker's edition) as the last perfect digest of both branches of law.

In reading the Reporters, enter in a common-place book every case of value, condensed into the narrowest compass possible which will admit of presenting distinctly the principles of the case. This operation is doubly useful, inasmuch as it obliges the student to seek out the pith of the case, and habituates him to a condensation of thought, and to an acquisition of the most valuable of all talents, that of never using two words where one will do. It fixes the case too more indelibly in the mind.

From XII to I. Read Politics.

Politics, general. Locke on government. Sidney on Government. Priestley's First principles of Government. Review of Montesquieu's Spirit of Laws. Anon.

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De Lolme sur la constitution d'Angleterre. De Burgh's Political disquisitions.

Hatsell's Precedents of the H. of Commons. Select Parliamy debates on England & Ireland.

Chipman's Sketches of the principles of government. The Federalist.

Political Economy. Say's Economie Politique. Malthus on the principles of population.

Tracy's work on Political Economy. *Now about to be printed* (1814).

In the AFTERNOON. Read History.

History. Antient the Greek and Latin originals.

Select histories from the Universal history. Gibbon's Decline of the Roman Empire.

Histoire Ancienne de Millot.

Modern. Histoire moderne de Millot. Russell's History of Modern Europe; Robertson's Charles V.

English. The original historians, to wit. The Hist. of Ed. II. by E. F. Habington's E. IV. More's R. III. Ld. Bacon's H. VIII. Ld. Herbert's H. VIII. Goodwin's H. VIII. E. VI. Mary. Cambden's Eliz. & James. Ludlow. McCaulay. Fox. Belsham. Baxter's Hist. of England. (Hume republicanised & abridged) Robertson's Hist. of Scotland.

American. Robertson's History of America.

Gordon's History of the independence of the U. S. Ramsay's Hist. of the Amer. Revolution. Burke's Hist of Virginia.

Continuation of do. by Jones and Girardin nearly ready for the press.

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From Dark to Bed-time. Belles lettres, criticism, Rhetoric, Oratory, to wit.

Belles lettres. Read the best of the poets, epic, didactic, dramatic, pastoral, lyric &c. But among these Shakespeare must be singled out by one who wishes to learn the full powers of the English language. Of him we must advise as Horace did of the Grecian models, 'vos exemplaria Graeca Nocturna versate manu, diversate diurna.'

Criticism. Ld Kaim's Elements of criticism. Tooke's Diversions of Purley. Of Bibliographical criticism the Edinbg Review furnishes the finest models extant.

Rhetoric. Blair's lectures on Rhetoric. Sheridan on Elocution. Mason on Poetic and Prosaic numbers.

Oratory. This portion of time (borrowing some of the afternoon when the days are long and the nights short) is to be applied to acquiring the art of writing & speaking correctly by the following exercises. Criticise the style of any books whatever, committing your criticisms to writing. Translate into the different styles, to wit, the elevated, the middling and the familiar. Orators and poets will furnish subjects of the first, historians of the second, & epistolary and Comic writers of the third—Undertake, at first, short compositions, as themes, letters &c., paying great attention to the correctness and elegance of your language. Read the Orations of Demosthenes & Cicero. Analyse these orations and examine the correctness of the disposition, language, figures, states of the cases, arguments &c. Read good samples of English eloquence, some of these may be found in Small's American speaker, and some in Carey's Criminal Recorder, in which last the defence of Eugene Aram is distinguishable as a model of logic, condensation of matter, & classical purity of style. Exercise yourself afterwards in preparing orations on feigned cases. In this observe rigorously the disposition of Blair into Introduction, Narration &c. Adapt your language & figures to the several parts of

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the oration, and suit your arguments to the audience before whom it is supposed to be spoken. This is your last and most important exercise. No trouble should therefore be spared. If you have any person in your neighborhood engaged in the same study, take each of you different sides of the same cause, and prepare pleadings, according to the custom of the bar, where the pl. opens, the def. answers and the pl. replies. It would farther be of great service to pronounce your orations (having only before you only short notes to assist the memory) in the presence of some person who may be considered as your judge.

Note. Under each of the preceding heads, the books are to be read in the order in which they are named. These by no means constitute the whole of what might be usefully read in each of these branches of science. The mass of excellent works going more into detail is great indeed. But those here noted will enable the student to select for himself such others of detail as may suit his particular views and dispositions, They will give him a respectable, an useful & satisfactory degree of knolege in these branches, and will themselves form a valuable and sufficient library for a lawyer, who is at the same time a lover of science.”

So for the paper; which I send you, not for it's merit, for it betrays sufficiently it's juvenile date; but because you have asked it. Your own experience in the more modern practice of the law will enable you to give it more conformity with the present course, and I know you will receive it kindly with all it's imperfections as an evidence of my great respect for your wishes, and of the sentiments of esteem and friendship of which I tender you sincere assurances.